

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

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UMBELLULARIA CALIFORNICA
CALIFORNIA BAY TREE

Prepared
by
RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
of the
NATIVE PLANTS OF CALIFORNIA
Santa Ana Canyon
Orange County
California

UMBELLULARIA CALIFORNICA
CALIFORNIA BAY TREE

Lauraceae

Laurel Family

Evergreen tree 50-75 ft. high, often over 100 ft. in spread and with a smooth trunk 6-8 ft. in diam. Leaves aromatic, alternate, thick, entire, oblong, $2\frac{1}{2}$ -5 in. long. Flowers in peduncled umbels, several in the terminal axils, thus forming a cluster of flowers $1\frac{1}{2}$ -2 in. across; pedicels about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. long, pale green. Sepals 6, oval or broadly ovate, greenish-white, petaloid; petals none; stamens 9, the anthers opening by uplifted flaps or valves, the 6 outer stamens opposite the sepals, spreading, the 3 inner erect around the ovary; 6 orange glands at base of filaments; ovary superior, 1-celled, 1-ovuled. Fruit a fleshy drupe, globose to ovoid, about 1 in. long, yellow or purple at maturity, containing a nearly spherical or ovoid thick shelled seed.

The genus Umbellularia (a Latin name meaning little umbel, in reference to the manner in which the flowers are borne) contains but a single species. The Lauraceae to which it belongs, however, contains about 1000 species of which the classic laurel and the avocado are well known.

First specimens of the California Bay Tree were collected on Beechey's Voyage either at San Francisco or Monterey and were described in 1833 by ^{Hoober} ~~Bentham~~ and Arnott, English botanists, under the name Tetranthera californica. Three years later, Nees transferred the plant to the genus Oreodaphne. In 1842, Thos. Nuttall proposed the new genus Umbellularia for the plant because it differed so markedly from all other known members of the Laurel family. His disposition of the California Bay Tree has been accepted by practically all subsequent botanists.

The California Bay Tree is known under a variety of English names. It is called the California Laurel, Pepper-wood and Oregon Myrtle. It is a common tree from southern Oregon south through the Coast Ranges and Sierra Nevada to San Diego County. It occupies a variety of habitats, being common from the ocean bluffs, where it is dwarfed and sprawling, to rich coastal valleys where it is a huge tree, and to mountain canyons and slopes where it may be a slender tree or a rounded shrub. Many large trees are known and it is doubtful if the one largest is definitely determined. In Marin County, about 5 miles north of San Rafael are many fine large specimens, one

of which we observed closely in 1934. It was estimated to be nearly 75 ft. high, 112 ft. in spread, and its huge trunk was 26 ft. around at its smallest point. Wood of the California Bay Tree is highly prized for cabinets, turned articles, for interior finish and for many other uses where a beautiful light colored wood taking a high polish is desired. The leaves are sometimes used as a substitute for the bay leaves of commerce.

Cultivation of the California Bay Tree has been practiced for many years and in old gardens trees of 30 to 50 years of age are sometimes encountered. Some cultivated specimens have been noted with trunks over 2 ft. in diameter and crowns 40 to 50 ft. across.

Aside from being a splendid large shade tree the California Bay Tree could well be used for large hedges. Even in a small garden a single plant could be kept trimmed to small size and the pungent aroma of its foliage will serve to strongly remind one of places far afield in the hills and valleys of California. Formal tubs or pots of laurels and boxwoods have not been so popular in recent years as formerly, but the California Bay Tree appears to offer interesting possibilities for this purpose.

Umbellularia californica appears to be free from serious pests and diseases, but sometimes harbors yellow and black scale which can be easily controlled by any of the common methods used on citrus.

Propagation of Umbellularia californica is by fruits gathered in October or November. These should have the flesh removed after which the seeds should be planted immediately in boxes of sand. As soon as sprouted (1 to 2 months) they should be put in cans or pots. The seedlings will attain heights of 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. the first season and should then be set out in their permanent locations. No special soils or exposures are needed, but the richer the soil and the greater the amount of water applied, the faster will be the growth. The tree is generally considered slow growing, our largest trees being about 14 ft. high and 10 years old. It is probable that under more intensive cultivation the trees could be made to far surpass these figures.

The California Bay Tree is readily obtained from nurserymen and can be set out from containers at any season of the year.

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
Of The Native Plants of California.

Established 1927

In Memory of John W. Bixby

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Purpose: A scientific institution devoted
to the growth and study of the native plants
of California for their botanical, horticult-
ural and popular features.

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